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Subject: Observation of Local Update of Census Addresses 1998 Field
Verification

I. INTRODUCTION

On October 14, 1999 I observed the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) 1998 Field Verification operation in Richmond, Virginia. This was very near the end of the operation, and I observed the completion of one of the last registers. At this point in the operation all the office and field staff were working very diligently to complete the operation in a timely manner.

II. OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

The area of Richmond in which I observed the operation was part of a historic area. This region had suffered economic stresses in recent decades, which resulted in the conversion of a large number of older homes with historic value into multi-unit apartment buildings, as an alternative to razing the structures. With the economic boom of the 1990s, however, many of these homes were being restored as single-family homes, with large sums of money being spent in the region to restore this historic district to its original grandeur. What this implied for the LUCA 1998 Field Verification listers is that there were many apartment units on their verification list that had disappeared in the reconversion of these houses back to single-family homes. That fact in conjunction with the Block Canvassing D1 deletes being followed up in this operation contributed to having most of the actions performed by the listers being deletes of the units in the register. The actual work of checking the status of these units was much more difficult.

Sometimes the houses were being converted during the time of the field check and were unoccupied. Without making assumptions on whether a particular housing unit was being converted into apartments or into a single-family home, when it was possible, checks were made on the number of electric meters, mailboxes or slots, entrance doors, doorbells, and central air-conditioning units. Sometimes all this information conflicted, and it was absolutely impossible to determine for sure how many housing units existed at a structure. What was unclear to the lister I observed, even after he spoke with some office personnel, was whether in these cases to err on the side of leaving the housing unit on the census list or to delete any units for which their existence as a separate housing unit was in doubt.

A major complication for this operation was that only some units in the register were to be acted on, and this often left the lister unable to reflect in the register what actually existed on the ground. For example, at one basic street address there were three apartments listed - apartments 1 and 2, and apartment B. The housing unit was now a single-family structure, but only one of the apartments allowed some action on the part of the lister. There were also some cases in which apartments did exist, but different apartment designations had been used in the previous operations, and now it was not possible to verify the correct designations and delete or correct the incorrect ones.

There was also some uncertainty about how to deal with condemned units that appeared on the list. The action code of uninhabitable was not offered in this operation. Condemned housing units were often undergoing renovations. There was no way of knowing how long a unit had been condemned and whether or not it was likely the unit would be renovated by Census Day. The lister I observed said that he had heard two theories on the issue of whether to leave the units on the list or to delete them; one was that all delete actions are equivalent, and so uninhabitable units should be deleted, while the other was that uninhabitable units could be restored to habitable by Census Day and should be kept on the list. A definitive answer to this question should be given to the office staff.

My other minor observations from the work I saw are that a very large percentage of the units to be verified were confirmations of deletes. Yet not all of the units on the field verification list ended up being deleted. One very good idea I saw put in use was carrying around the local yellow pages to check for possible commercial units. The white pages would also have been helpful on at least one occasion. Also, the lister I observed found the address register a bit cumbersome and prepared for canvassing the assignment by listing all the addresses to be checked on a separate sheet of paper, along with all the addresses having the same basic street address. This is a good idea only if the lister remembers to consult the original address list and the maps frequently. The lister I observed was fairly consistent with checking these materials, but it is easy to see how somebody could become frustrated with paging through the whole register for their work

and end up abandoning the register and the maps.

In summary, although this operation is intended to rectify disparities in housing unit status from the operations of LUCA 1998 and Block Canvassing, sometimes the setup did not allow a complete rectification. In particular the lack of the uninhabitable action code and the inability to act on apartment designations that were incorrect hampered the ability of the field verification lister to correct the problems with the housing unit list.

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